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Providing Work Opportunities for All

USAID's cash-for-work projects bring jobs to physically disabled Afghans and stability to vulnerable communities



[Photo: USAID/CADG]

“No one wanted to hire me, but I didn’t want to depend on others for survival...now I’ve got enough money to buy food for my family.”

- Esmatullah, cash-for-work beneficiary

For many ordinary Afghans, making ends meet is a daily struggle. The challenge of finding work is even more daunting for the physically disabled. After years of war and continuing violence, an average of one out of every five households in Afghanistan has a family member with a disability. Meanwhile, the country faces an estimated unemployment rate of 35 percent, meaning that jobs are scarce for the able-bodied and physically challenged alike.

Like most Afghan men, Esmatullah has a family to support. However, the Kandahar City resident has the added challenge of overcoming a physical handicap—the lingering effects of being shot during the Soviet Union’s occupation of Afghanistan. Despite the best efforts of the doctors, Esmatullah never recovered full use of one arm and one leg. As a result he was only able to find sporadic, low-paying work, if he was lucky.

Then Esmatullah learned that the Kandahar municipal government needed laborers to work on a USAID-funded canal retaining wall refurbishment project in Arghandab District. “No one wanted to hire me, but I don’t want to depend on others for survival. I thought I had a chance to get a job with this project,” he said. He applied for work and was hired to distribute water to the workers. Now, he earns an honest living that allows him to help support his family and reduces his dependence on others. “The work pays a fair wage, so now I’ve got enough money to buy food for my family,” said Esmatullah.

The Arghandab canal project is funded by USAID’s Community Development Program (CDP), which promotes stability in Afghanistan’s most volatile provinces through temporary employment and income generation opportunities to reduce the number of food-insecure Afghans, and assist local government structures to respond to community needs and address the drivers of instability. This retaining wall is just one of many cash-for-work projects throughout Afghanistan that provide a source of income for people who live in unstable environments. Unemployment is a significant driver of instability throughout Afghanistan, and cash-for-work projects are an essential contributor to bring stability to vulnerable areas throughout the country.